

UNDERSTANDING SCOTLAND


THE SCOTTISH WELLBEING INDEX

November 2021



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UNDERSTANDING SCOTLAND

Understanding Scotland is a new quarterly survey tool measuring the most important facets of our lives and decision-making in Scotland: our society, economy, and environment.

This high-quality, large-scale survey tool is brought to you by Diffley Partnership and Charlotte Street Partners.

We are extremely grateful for this inaugural wave's sponsors who have made this exciting new endeavour possible.



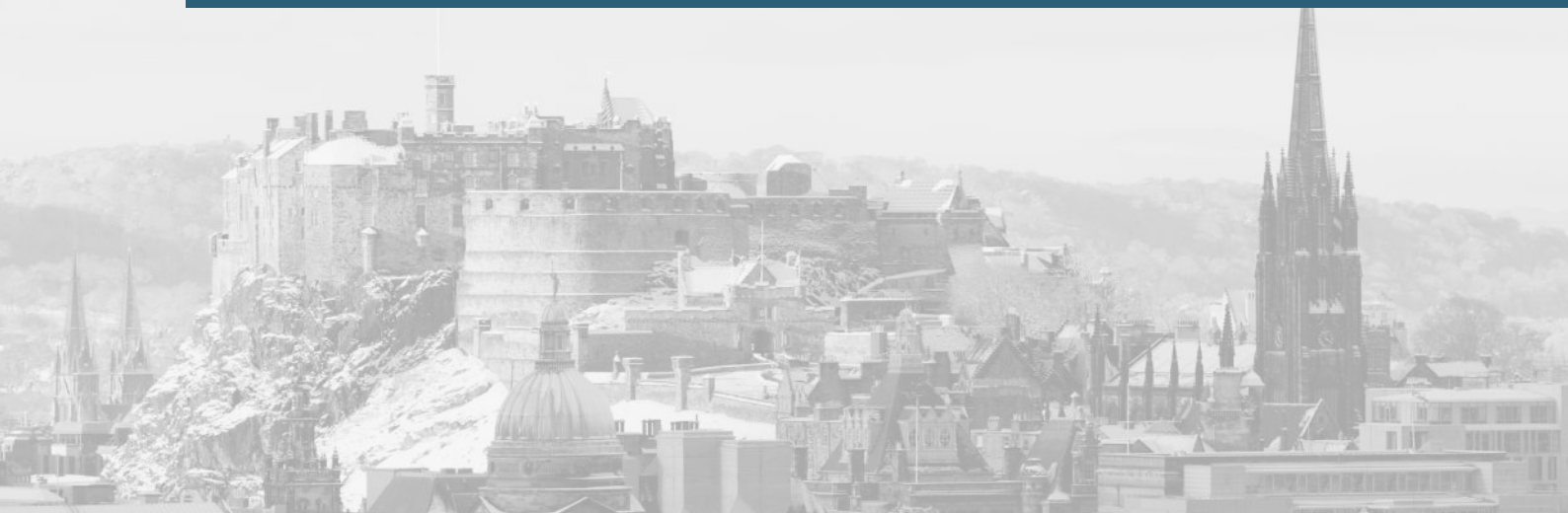
FOREWORD

Understanding wellbeing is important on a number of levels. For each of us and those with whom we live, how we feel about our lives impacts on our relationship and our work. At the other end of the scale, government should strive to understand national wellbeing so that it can plan policies and allocate resources accordingly.

It is in this spirit that we publish the new Scottish Wellbeing Index; in doing so we aim to shine a light on how we view our lives, how optimistic we are about our lives in the future, and how happy or otherwise we are feeling.

This inaugural publication reveals some stark and revealing trends. It is not at all surprising that we do not all think the same about the current or future value of our lives; however, the scale of the differences in how we feel according to issues like social class and employment status should make us all sit up and take notice.

We hope these insights add to the growing national discussion about the wellbeing of the nation and how it can be improved.



INTRODUCTION

WELLBEING - NOVEMBER 2021

We are delighted to present this inaugural edition of the Scottish Wellbeing Index report. Part of the new Understanding Scotland survey, this report is just one of a series of recent and forthcoming publications, taking the pulse of Scotland with regards to society, the economy and the environment.

The Index will measure and monitor subjective wellbeing in Scotland at regular intervals, both gauging our direction of travel, and bolstering our understanding of wellbeing and its various facets and determinants through its bank of valuable data.

In this edition we introduce our new index of Scottish wellbeing, and explore the factors that shape and influence how content we feel in our lives and in ourselves. In this report we explore how subjective wellbeing among the Scottish public varies according to demographic, geographic, professional, educational and socioeconomic characteristics.

We present two complementary measures of wellbeing: a unitary headline indicator of subjective wellbeing, and another composite measure encompassing life satisfaction and feelings of worth, happiness and anxiety. These measures, respectively, provide a valuable headline index of Scottish wellbeing, and offer the depth of detail by which to improve our understanding of wellbeing, its different aspects and its determinants.

Our polling and analysis finds that a clear majority of the Scottish population are broadly positive about their lives, but with considerable inequalities of wellbeing, both demographically and geographically, with younger respondents reporting lower wellbeing. Professional and socioeconomic factors appear to have the starkest impacts on wellbeing, with highly detrimental effects of unemployment, inactivity and deprivation recorded. These and other key findings are outlined in the summary and, in greater detail, throughout the report.

THE SCOTTISH WELLBEING INDEX

IN 10 POINTS



01

A CLEAR MAJORITY OF THE SCOTTISH PUBLIC CAN BE SAID TO FEEL BROADLY POSITIVE ABOUT THEIR LIVES

51% of respondents can be thought of as feeling broadly positive about their lives, with a reported wellbeing score of at least 7 out of 10, compared to only 10% who are broadly negative about their lives, with a score of 3 or lower.

02

HOWEVER, THERE ARE SUBSTANTIAL INEQUALITIES AND VARIATIONS WITHIN THIS

There are notable differences in wellbeing between demographic groups, with older and more affluent respondents reporting above-average wellbeing, while unemployed, inactive and disadvantaged respondents see markedly lower wellbeing.

03

THE SCOTTISH POPULATION IS BROADLY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THEIR WELLBEING OVER THE NEXT 5 YEARS

With the exception of retirees and older respondents, all groups anticipate higher wellbeing in 5 years' time. This is especially pronounced among students and young people.

04

WITH AGE COMES IMPROVED WELLBEING, THOUGH PERHAPS NOT FOREVER

Older and retired individuals report the highest average levels of wellbeing - both overall and on individual aspects thereof - but are unique in expecting this to fall in the coming years.

05

SOCIOECONOMIC DISPARITIES ARE REFLECTED STARKLY IN SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING

Wellbeing is, on average, 1.25 points or 23% higher in the most prosperous fifth of neighbourhoods than in the most deprived 20%. Respondents in the most deprived areas also deemed their lives 20% less worthwhile than their most affluent counterparts, and were over five times as likely to be 'not at all satisfied' with their lives.

06

UNEMPLOYMENT & INACTIVITY HAVE SIGNIFICANT DETRIMENTAL IMPACTS ON WELLBEING

Employment status saw the starkest differences in wellbeing. Among the unemployed and the inactive/unable to work, respectively, average wellbeing is 26% and 31% below the national average.

07

THE SCOTTISH POPULATION FEEL LARGELY SATISFIED, WORTHWHILE AND HAPPY, BUT ANXIETY IS HIGH

On specific aspects of wellbeing the findings are broadly positive: 55% and 58% respectively deem their lives satisfying and worthwhile. Over half (55%) had felt happy the previous day, but a third (32%) reported feeling anxious.

08

EMPLOYMENT IS CLOSELY RELATED TO FEELINGS OF WORTH

Forms of employment have an evident impact on people's sense of purpose, with the unemployed and those unable to work markedly less likely to feel things in their life are worthwhile, while the self-employed are most likely to do so.

09

FEMALE AND YOUNGER RESPONDENTS REPORT HIGHER ANXIETY

While sex had only minor impacts on life satisfaction, worth and happiness, 2 in 5 female respondents (37%) reported feeling anxious the previous day compared to only 26% of men. Younger respondents were also markedly more anxious than their older counterparts.

10

STUDENTS FARE BETTER IN ALL ASPECTS OF WELLBEING THAN YOUNG PEOPLE IN GENERAL

While still below the national average, students report higher life satisfaction and happiness, and lower anxiety, than young people more broadly. Furthermore, they report above-average feelings of worth, leading their younger counterparts by 12% in this regard.

METHODOLOGY & TERMINOLOGY

This report presents the findings of recent polling conducted on over 2,000 members of the Scottish adult (16+) population relating to their subjective wellbeing. Our research comprised two measures/indicators of wellbeing, both of which are robust and reliable, though subtly distinct. This report outlines the two measures in turn, and explores how these vary between groups.

SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING

Our first measure, at the core of the Scottish Wellbeing Index, uses the Cantril Ladder, a measure of general subjective wellbeing. Respondents were asked to imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to ten at the top, where the top of the ladder represents the best possible life, and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for them. Respondents were asked to indicate which step of the ladder they would say they stood on at the time, and which step they expected to be on in 5 years' time. As a unitary headline indicator, this is the metric we use when referring to 'wellbeing' holistically and in our Scottish Wellbeing Index.

ASPECTS OF WELLBEING

The second indicator is a composite measure of wellbeing used by the Office for National Statistics which combines aspects of both life evaluation and daily emotional affect. This measure asks respondents to rate, on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is 'not at all' and 10 is 'completely', how satisfied they are with their life, how worthwhile they believe their life to be, how happy they felt yesterday, and how anxious they felt yesterday.

As such, this multi-faceted measure offers complementary detail and nuance by which to unpick and understand the various facets, drivers and determinants of wellbeing.



STRUCTURE OF REPORT & PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This report presents the findings of recent polling conducted on the Scottish adult (16+) population relating to their wellbeing. Our research comprises two measures/indicators of wellbeing, both of which are robust and reliable, though subtly distinct.

We begin by outlining our new Scottish Wellbeing Index, reflecting on overall subjective wellbeing, and explore how this varies between groups on the basis of demography, geography, employment status and socioeconomic circumstances, among others. In the interests of clarity, this section relies on the unitary Cantril measure of wellbeing.

We then turn to our understanding of wellbeing. We explore a number of individual aspects and facets of wellbeing in Scotland - life satisfaction, and feelings of worth, happiness and anxiety - with a view to developing a more granular understanding of wellbeing and its drivers. To this end, we draw out noteworthy findings and how these vary across demographic groups.



THE SCOTTISH WELLBEING INDEX

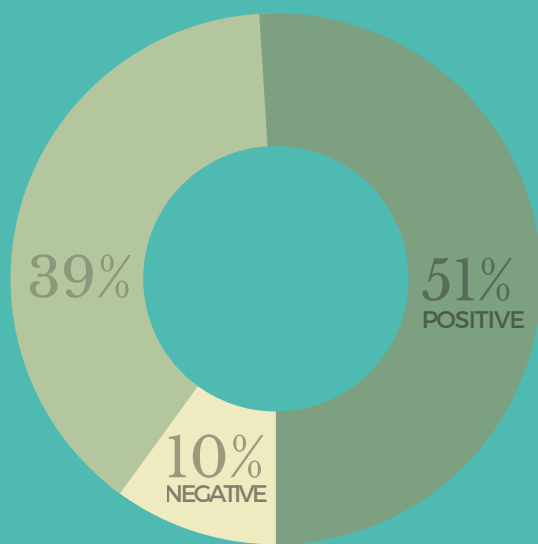
The following section presents our unitary indicator of overall subjective wellbeing. Using the Cantril ladder measure of subjective wellbeing, respondents were asked to rate their life on a scale from 0-10, where 0 represents the worst possible life and 10 represents the best possible life for them.

On average, subjective wellbeing among the Scottish population stands at 6.18 out of 10. We find that a majority of the Scottish population can be thought of as broadly positive about their life, with 51% giving an answer of 7 or higher. In contrast, only 10% can be thought of as broadly negative about their life, categorised as giving an answer of 3 or lower.

However, this varies considerably between demographic groups, with older and more affluent respondents reporting greater wellbeing. Conversely, the unemployed and inactive, and those living in deprived communities demonstrate markedly lower wellbeing.



SCOTLAND'S WELLBEING

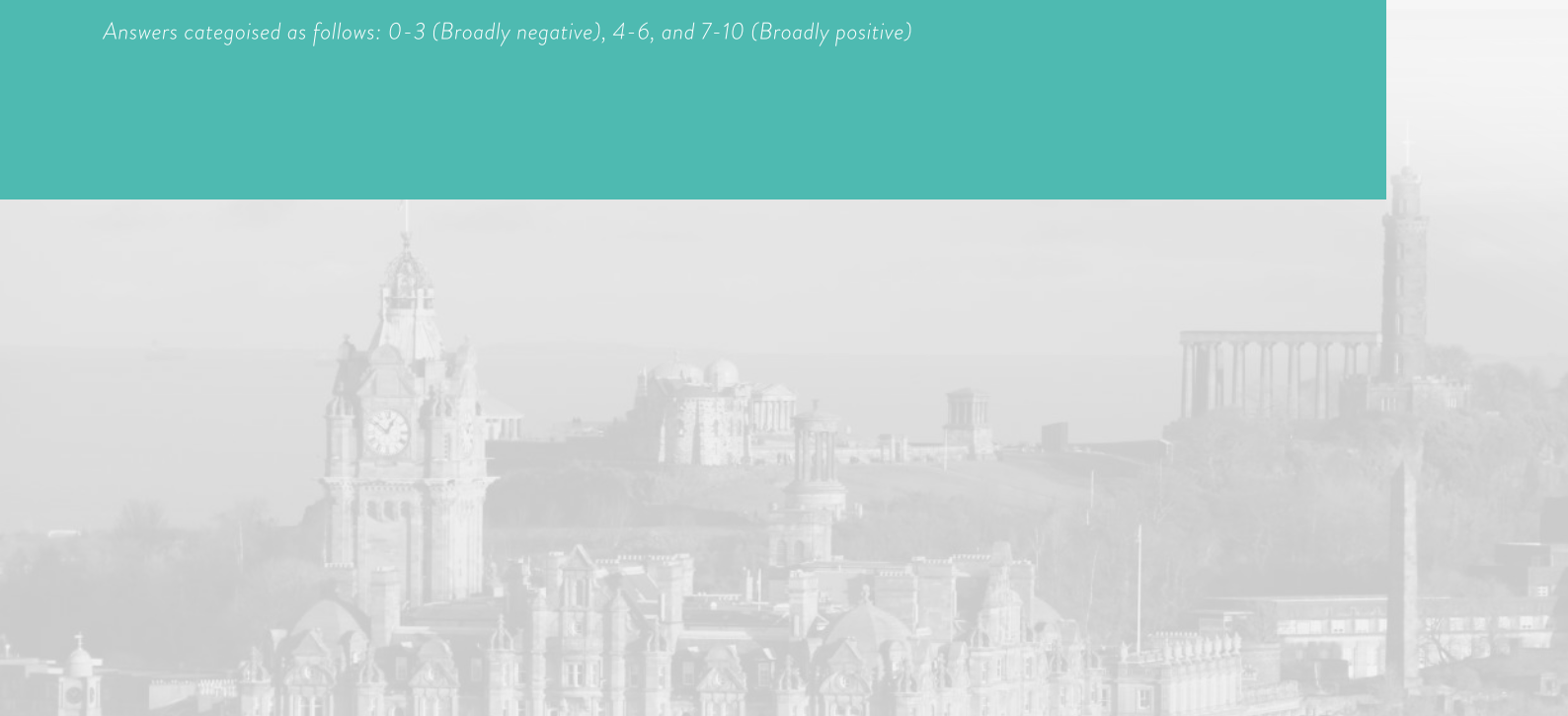


Over half the population (51%) can be thought of as broadly positive about their current life, with only one in ten broadly negative. 39% fall somewhere between these.

The rest of this report explores how this varies along demographic, geographic, professional and social lines.

Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to ten at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?

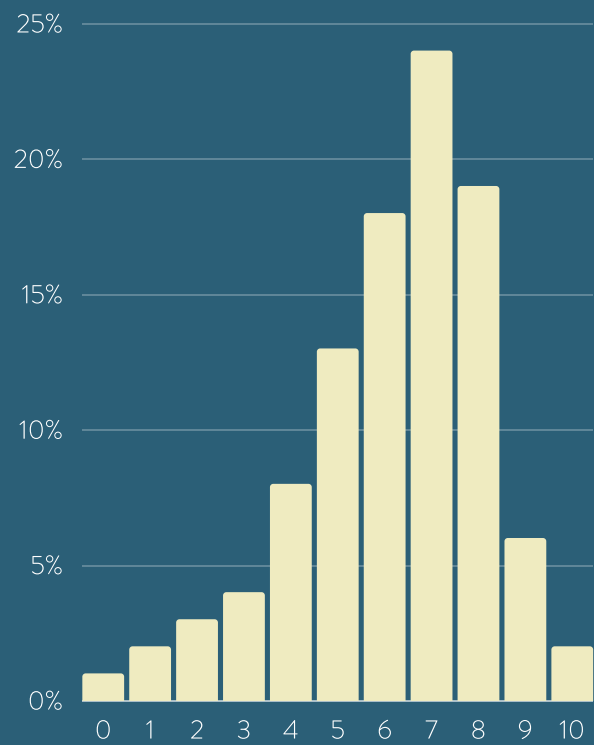
Answers categorised as follows: 0-3 (Broadly negative), 4-6, and 7-10 (Broadly positive)



SCOTLAND'S WELLBEING

The most frequent answer, given by a quarter (24%) of respondents was 7 out of 10, while 60% of respondents fell between 6 and 8.

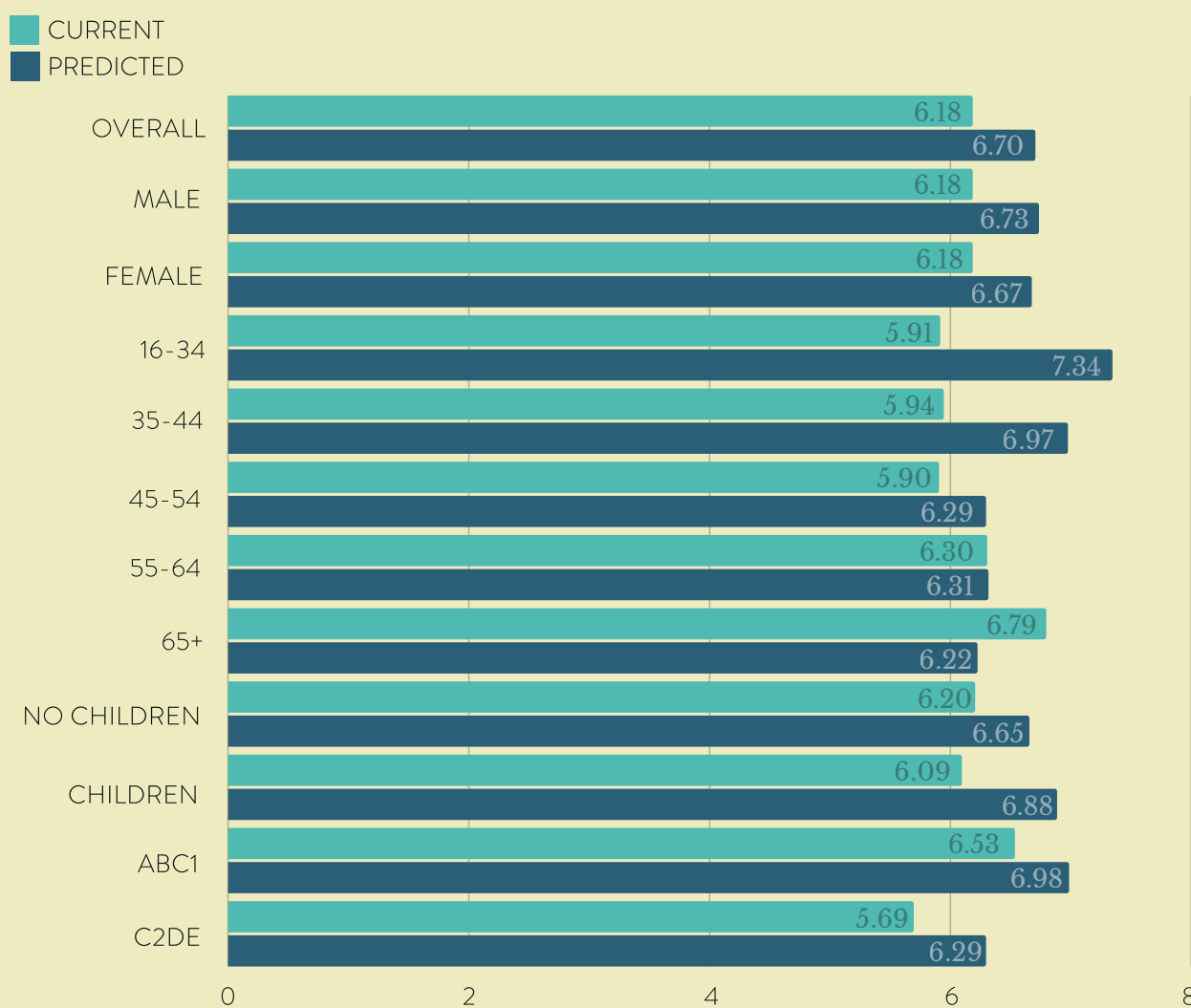
At the extremes, 1.7% of people judged themselves to have the best possible life, while 0.7% deemed theirs the worst possible life.



Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to ten at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?

CURRENT & ANTICIPATED SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING

Mean current subjective wellbeing and mean predicted wellbeing in 5 years' time, disaggregated by sex, age, family composition, and social grade



Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to ten at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time? On which step do you think you will stand about five years from now?

REGIONAL INEQUALITIES IN WELLBEING

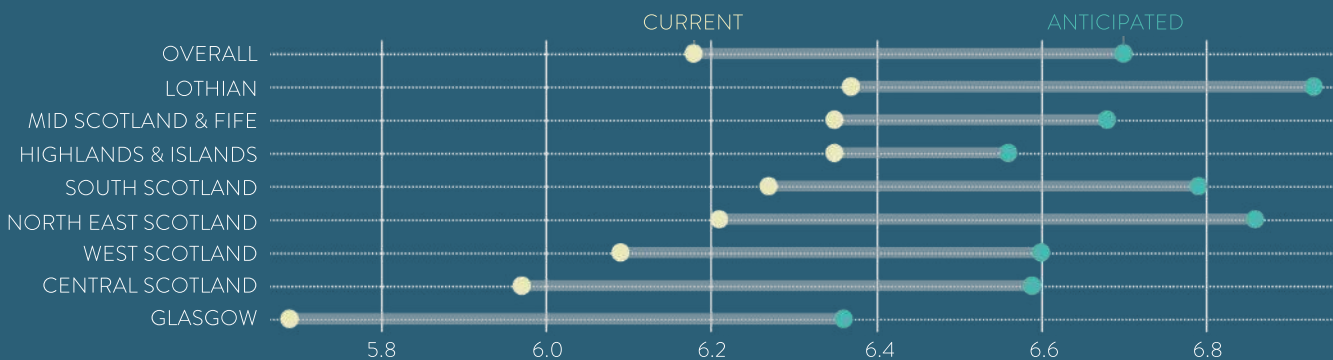
There are notable inequalities both between and within regions.

The Lothian region is both the happiest and most equal in terms of current subjective wellbeing. Glasgow, conversely, is the least happy by a considerable margin and the most unequal. While the Highlands & Islands and South Scotland have above-average wellbeing overall, there is significant variation within this.

However, all regions exhibit significant differences, with at least 4.6 points between the average reported wellbeing of the top and bottom quintile in each region.

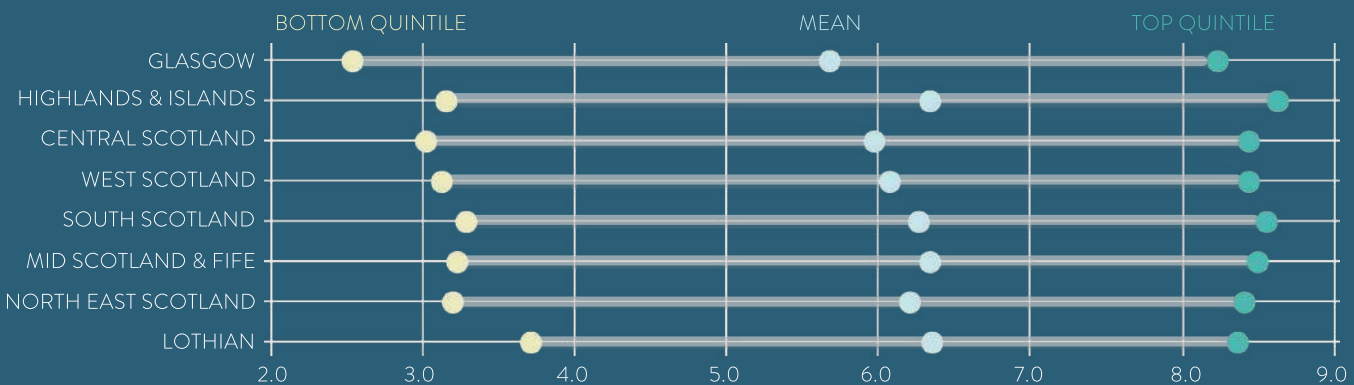
INTER-REGIONAL INEQUALITIES

Mean current and predicted subjective wellbeing out of 10, broken down by parliamentary region



INTRA-REGIONAL INEQUALITIES

Mean subjective wellbeing out of 10 for the top and bottom quintile in each parliamentary region, ordered by the difference between these



Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to ten at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time? On which step do you think you will stand about five years from now?

Quintiles refer to the fifth of respondents in each region reporting the highest and lowest wellbeing, from whom a mean score has been computed



INEQUALITIES BY SOCIAL CLASS & DEPRIVATION

There is an evident correlation between socioeconomic circumstances/status and subjective wellbeing, with some of the starkest inequalities breaking along such lines.

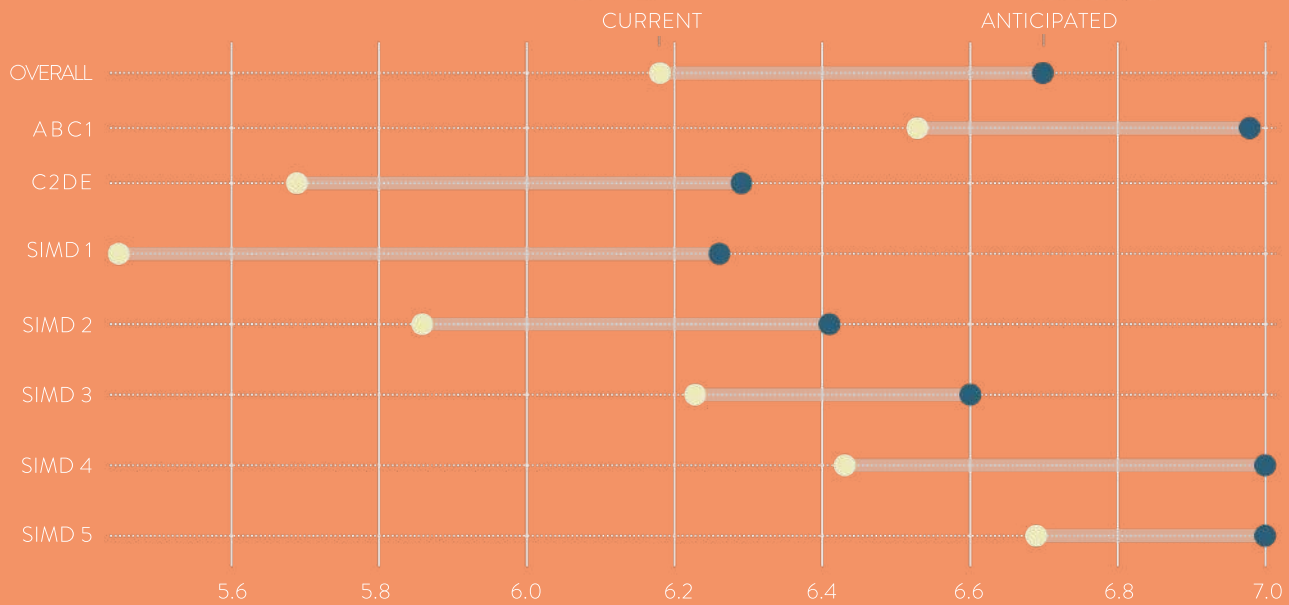
Average current subjective wellbeing is 1.25 points or 19% lower among people living in the fifth of most deprived neighbourhoods than among those in the least deprived neighbourhoods. This difference is almost double that between the most and least happy regions.

All groups are, on average, optimistic with regards to their expectations of future wellbeing. Among more affluent respondents, however, expectations are more modest, with smaller rises predicted than among those in more deprived communities where expected improvements are much larger.



SOCIOECONOMIC INEQUALITIES

Mean current and predicted subjective wellbeing out of 10, broken down by social grade and SIMD quintile



Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to ten at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time? On which step do you think you will stand about five years from now?



DIFFERENCES BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Of all demographic factors explored, employment status saw the starkest variations in wellbeing. All forms of employment were associated with higher average wellbeing than all forms of unemployment and inactivity, with the notable exception of retirement.

Among the unemployed, wellbeing was 26% lower than the general population, and 31% lower among the inactive and those unable to work due to disability or long-term sickness.

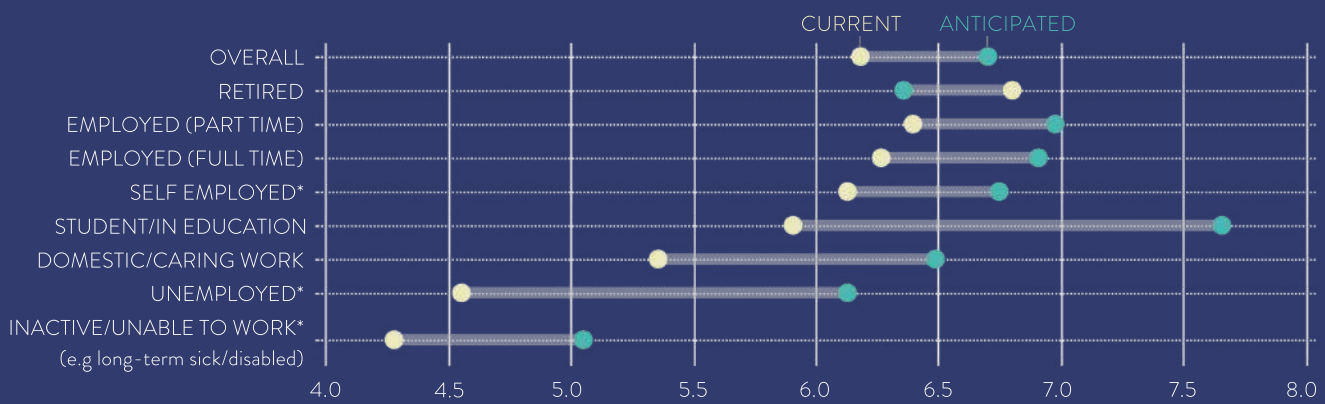
Retirees were the happiest group, though were unique in expecting their wellbeing to deteriorate over the next five years. All other groups expected their wellbeing to improve, though to varying degrees, with students, the unemployed, and those undertaking domestic and/or caring work anticipating the largest improvements on average. Conversely, those who are economically inactive owing to disability or long-term sickness still expect their wellbeing to improve, but have markedly lower expectations than their unemployed counterparts.

Within all categories there was significant variation. Unemployment, however, appears to have the most consistent detrimental impact on wellbeing, with the smallest within-category variation and the lowest upper quintile mean score.



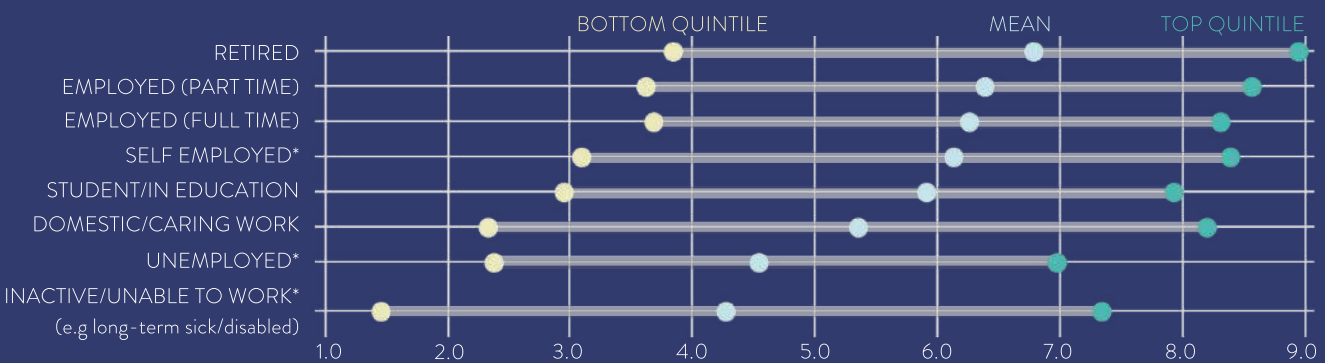
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Mean current and predicted subjective wellbeing out of 10 for the top and bottom quintile by employment status



VARIATION WITHIN EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Mean subjective wellbeing out of 10 for the top and bottom quintile for each employment status



Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to ten at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time? On which step do you think you will stand about five years from now?

Quintiles refer to the fifth of respondents in each category reporting the highest and lowest wellbeing, from whom a mean score has been computed

* denotes small sample size (n < 100)



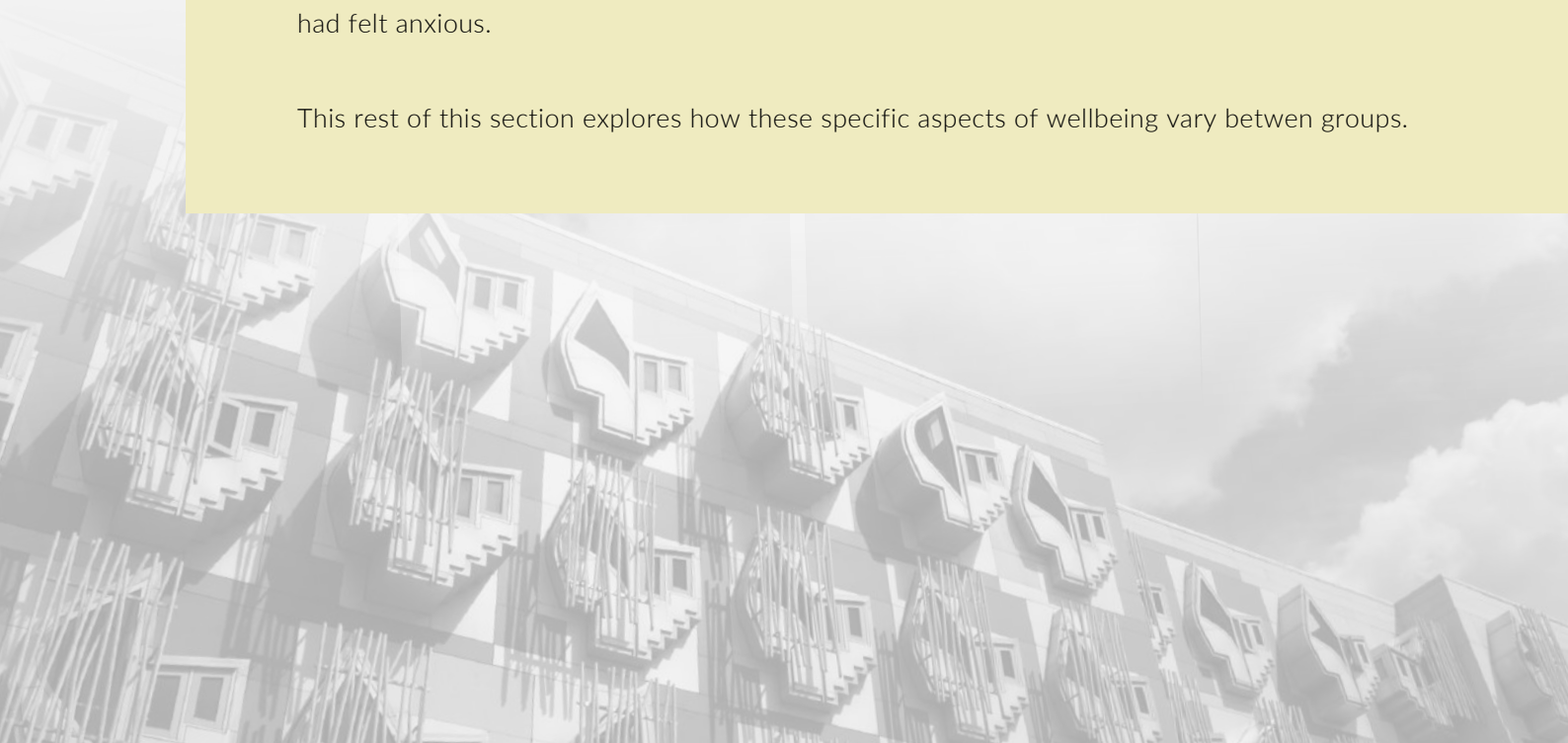
UNDERSTANDING WELLBEING

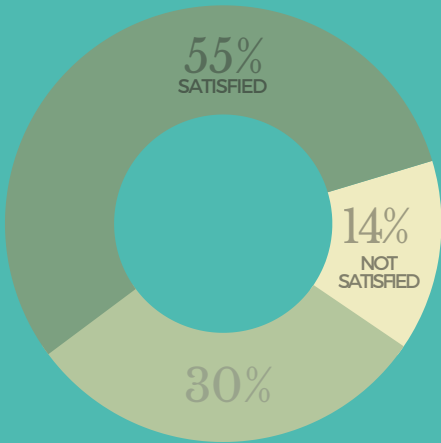
Our second measure of wellbeing is a composite indicator, assessing the extent to which people are satisfied with their lives, the extent to which they feel their life is worthwhile, and how happy and anxious they felt yesterday.

This second (composite) measure of wellbeing complements the first in numerous ways, mirroring its headline findings, and providing greater depth into individual facets of wellbeing. As such, while these findings do not feed directly into our overall Scottish Wellbeing Index scores, they do offer valuable data by which to enrich our understanding of the various facets and determinants of wellbeing.

Over half the population overall (55%) can be said to be broadly satisfied with their life, compared to 14% that are broadly not satisfied. 58% believe their life feels broadly worthwhile, with 13% reporting the opposite. Over half (55%) had felt happy the day before our poll, while a third (32%) had felt anxious.

This rest of this section explores how these specific aspects of wellbeing vary between groups.

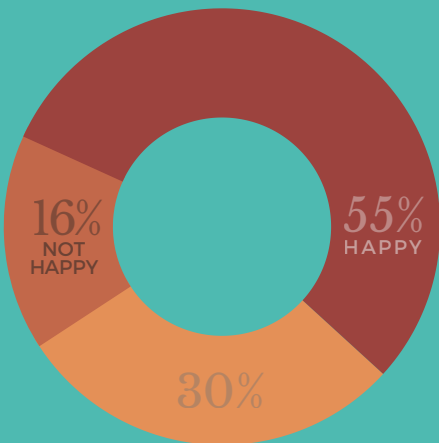




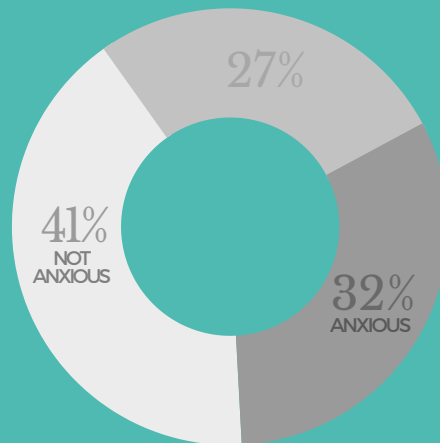
Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? Where 0 is 'not at all satisfied' and 10 is 'completely satisfied'?*



Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? Where 0 is 'not at all worthwhile' and 10 is 'completely worthwhile'?*



Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday? Where 0 is 'not at all happy' and 10 is 'completely happy'?*



On a scale where 0 is 'not at all anxious' and 10 is 'completely anxious', overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?*

*Responses categorised as follows: 7-10 (satisfied, worthwhile, happy, anxious), 4-6, and 0-3 (not satisfied, not worthwhile, not happy, not anxious)



ASPECTS OF WELLBEING BY AGE AND SEX

There are minimal differences between sexes with regards to life satisfaction, feelings of worth, and happiness. However, anxiety saw a sharp difference between male and female respondents, with almost two in five female respondents (37%) reporting feeling anxious the day prior to polling, compared to only a quarter (26%) of male respondents.

Age had notable effects on all aspects of wellbeing, with older respondents significantly better off in all regards than their younger counterparts.

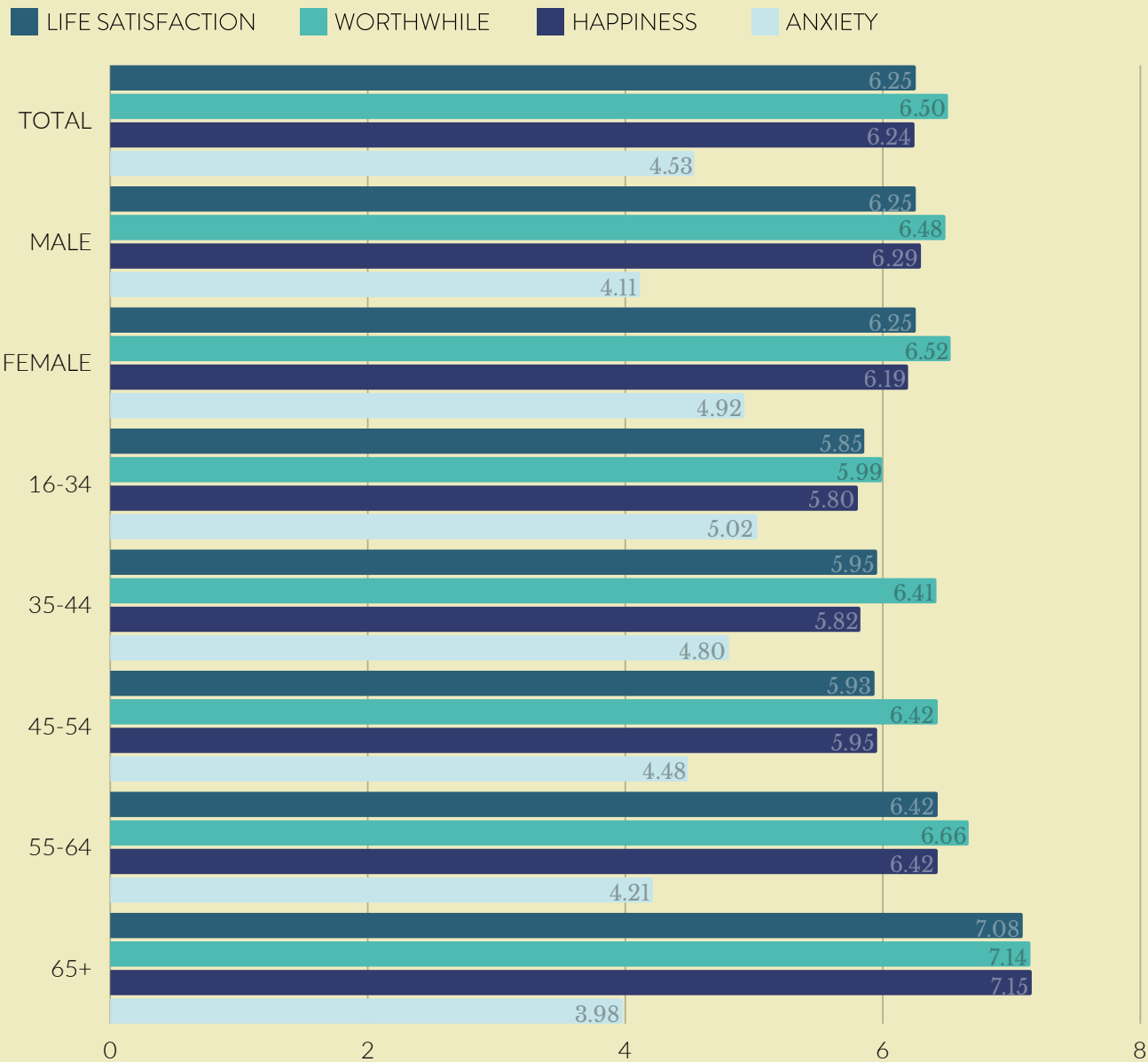
Anxiety saw consistent gradual improvements between age brackets, with younger respondents notably more anxious than older individuals. Life satisfaction and happiness were broadly flat up to middle age, before rising markedly and jointly beyond the age of 55.

While average life satisfaction, happiness and worth were tightly clustered early and later in life, worth diverged from the other two aspects, with an early sharp rise, followed by more gradual increases to converge with the other two aspects among older age brackets.



ASPECTS OF WELLBEING BY AGE AND SEX

Weighted average of respondents' levels of life satisfaction, feelings of worth, happiness, and anxiety



Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? Where 0 is 'not at all satisfied' and 10 is 'completely satisfied'

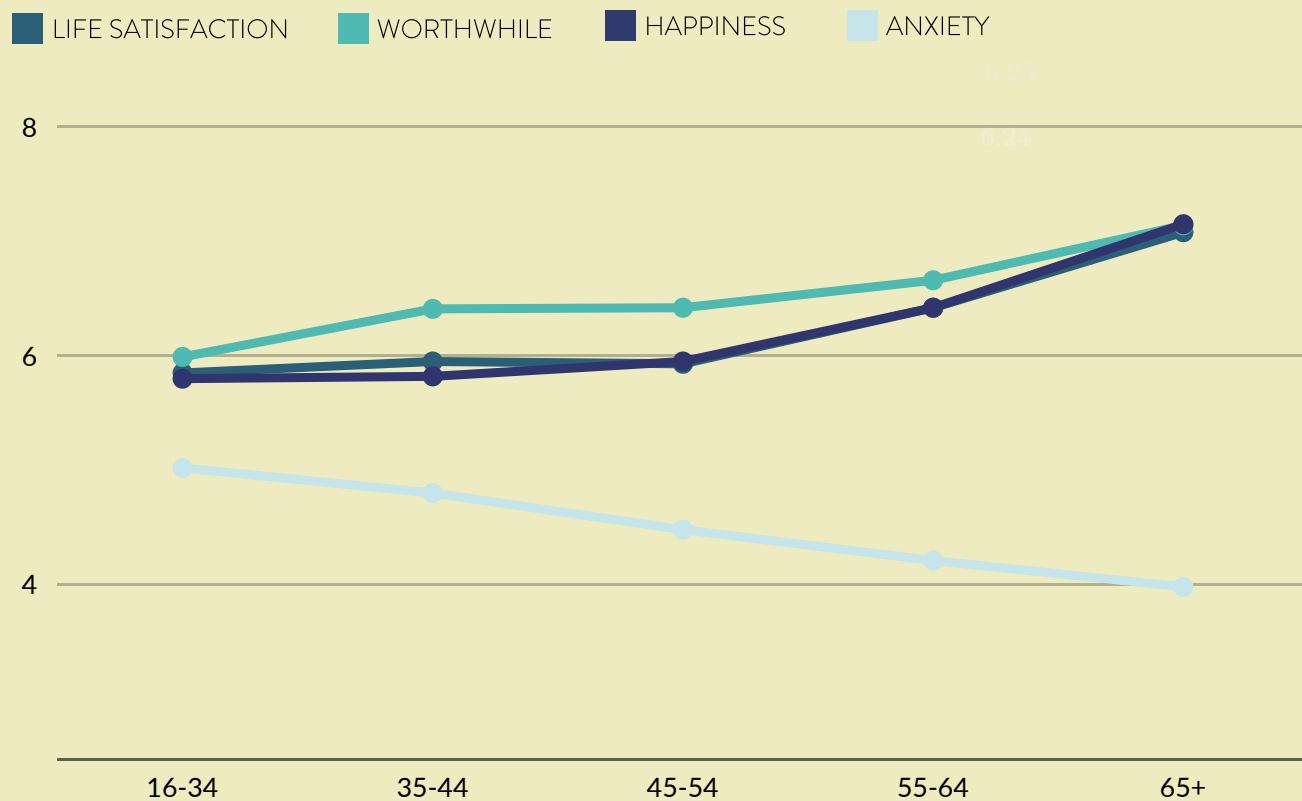
Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? Where 0 is 'not at all worthwhile' and 10 is 'completely worthwhile'.

Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday? Where 0 is 'not at all happy' and 10 is 'completely happy'.

On a scale where 0 is 'not at all anxious' and 10 is 'completely anxious', overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

ASPECTS OF WELLBEING ACROSS AGE BRACKETS

Weighted average of respondents' levels of life satisfaction, feelings of worth, happiness, and anxiety



Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? Where 0 is 'not at all satisfied' and 10 is 'completely satisfied'

Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? Where 0 is 'not at all worthwhile' and 10 is 'completely worthwhile'.

Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday? Where 0 is 'not at all happy' and 10 is 'completely happy'.

On a scale where 0 is 'not at all anxious' and 10 is 'completely anxious', overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

ASPECTS OF WELLBEING BY SOCIAL CLASS & DEPRIVATION

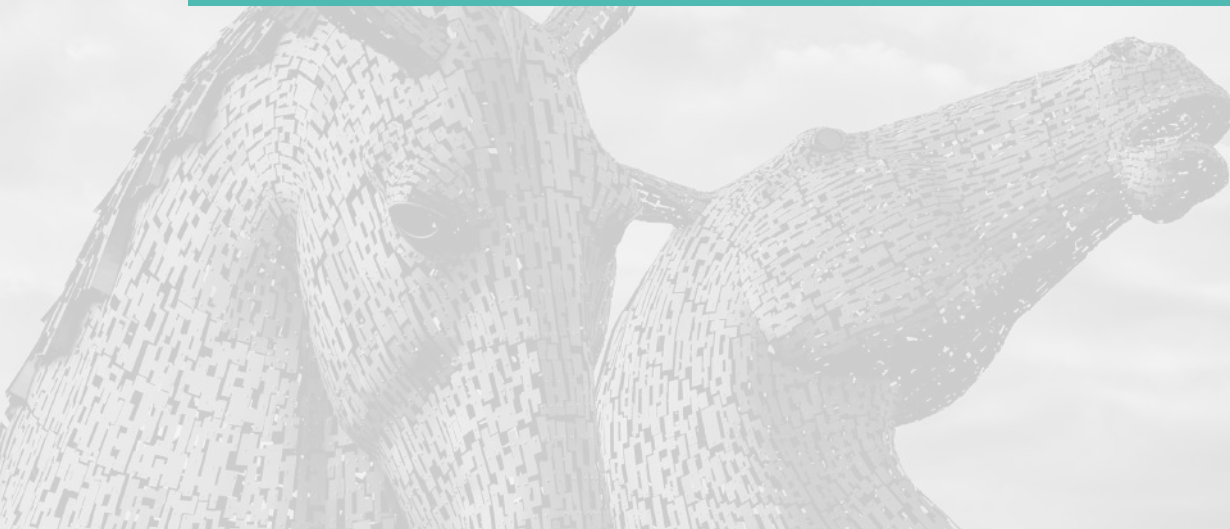
Our analysis finds stark differences in life satisfaction, worth, happiness and anxiety breaking along socioeconomic lines.

C2DE respondents deemed their lives 12% less satisfying than their ABC1 counterparts and 11% less worthwhile. They were also 9% less happy and 8% more anxious the previous day.

21% of people in the most deprived areas were broadly not satisfied with their lives, compared to 10% in the least deprived areas. Perhaps most strikingly, 4.5% of individuals in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods were 'not at all satisfied' with their life, over 5 times the proportion saying the same in the least deprived areas.

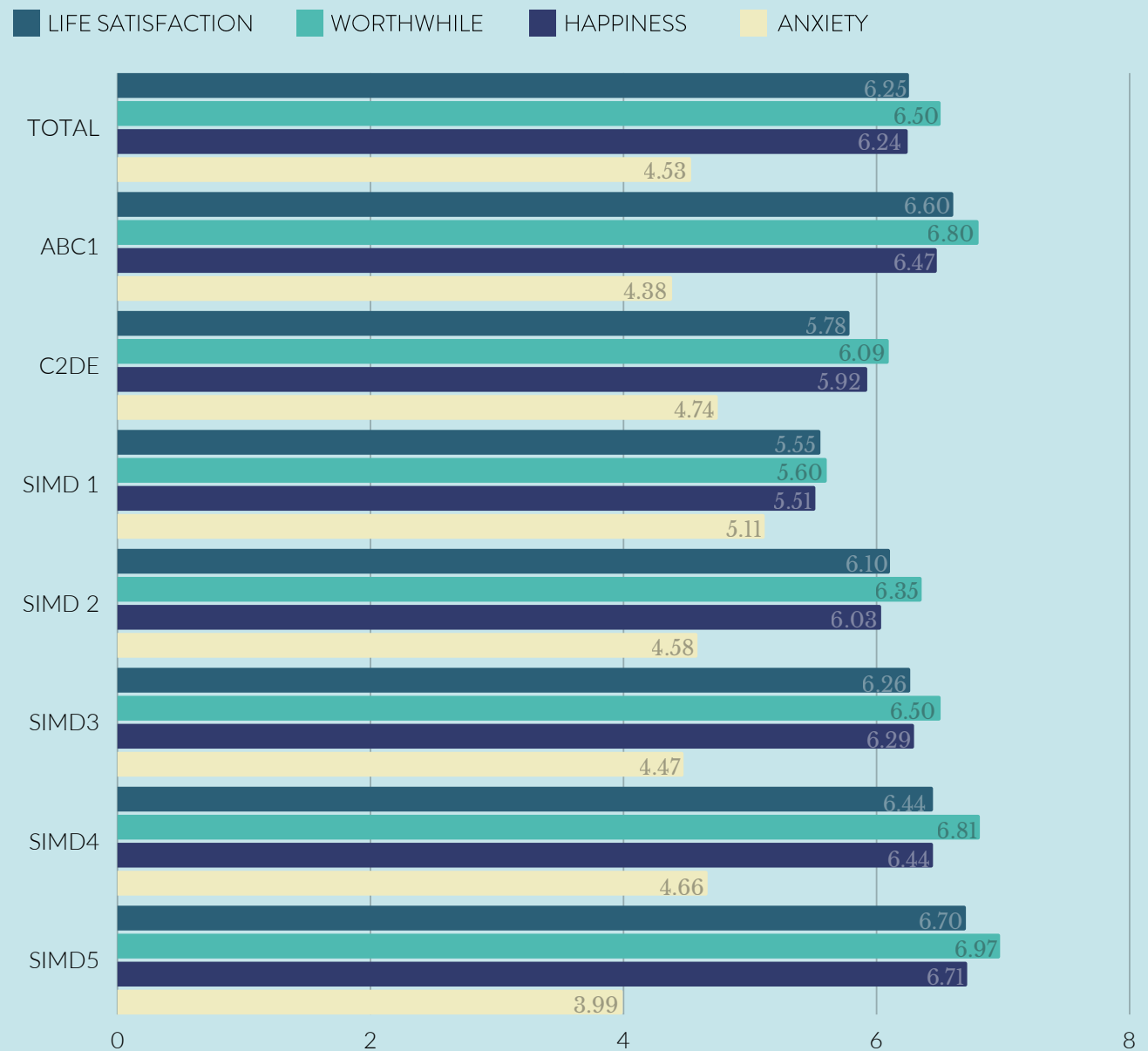
Those in the least deprived areas were 20 percentage points more likely to have felt happy the previous day (64%) than those in the most deprived (44%).

Not only were respondents in the most deprived areas more likely to have felt anxious the previous day (36%) than those in the most affluent areas (25%), but the degree of anxiety was also higher.



ASPECTS OF WELLBEING BY SOCIAL GRADE AND DEPRIVATION

Weighted average of respondents' levels of life satisfaction, feelings of worth, happiness, and anxiety



Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? Where 0 is 'not at all satisfied' and 10 is 'completely satisfied'

Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? Where 0 is 'not at all worthwhile' and 10 is 'completely worthwhile'.

Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday? Where 0 is 'not at all happy' and 10 is 'completely happy'.

On a scale where 0 is 'not at all anxious' and 10 is 'completely anxious', overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

ASPECTS OF WELLBEING BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Employment status saw some of the starkest differences in wellbeing between groups. As above, all forms of employment are associated with higher wellbeing than all forms of unemployment or inactivity, bar retirement. However, there are noteworthy findings with regards to individual aspects of wellbeing.

There are particularly interesting interactions between worth and work, with employment generally associated with a stronger likelihood to feel that things in one's life are worthwhile.

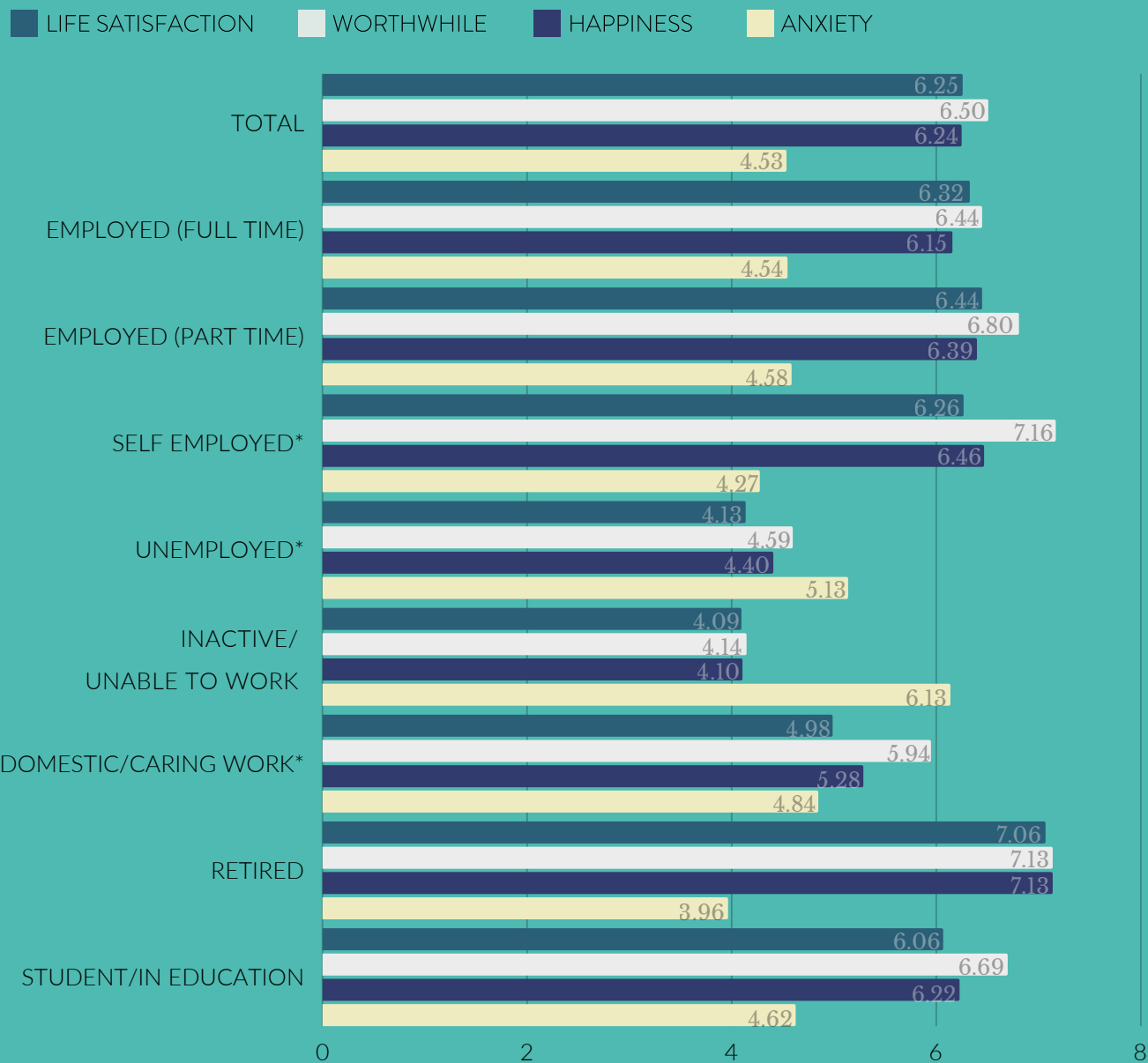
On average, worth exceeded life satisfaction across all groups, though this was most pronounced among the self-employed and those doing domestic/caring work. While the self-employed had roughly average life satisfaction, they reported the strongest feelings that things in their life were worthwhile, and reported among the lowest incidence of anxiety. Conversely, feelings of worth were significantly below average among the unemployed and those unable to work.

The unemployed and those unable to work reported the lowest levels of life satisfaction, worth and happiness, and the highest levels of anxiety. Half of those unable to work had felt anxious the previous day, and 14% had felt 'completely anxious', compared to 4% of the population overall.

While a smaller than average proportion of the unemployed reported feeling anxious, those who did reported a markedly higher degree of anxiety than the general population, with 11% reporting that they had felt 'completely anxious' the day prior to completing the survey. Anxiety was also elevated among those carrying out domestic/caring work, 37% of whom reported feelings of anxiety the previous day.

ASPECTS OF WELLBEING BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Weighted average of respondents' levels of life satisfaction, feelings of worth, happiness, and anxiety



Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? Where 0 is 'not at all satisfied' and 10 is 'completely satisfied'

Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? Where 0 is 'not at all worthwhile' and 10 is 'completely worthwhile'.

Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday? Where 0 is 'not at all happy' and 10 is 'completely happy'.

On a scale where 0 is 'not at all anxious' and 10 is 'completely anxious', overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

* denotes small sample size ($n < 100$)

ASPECTS OF WELLBEING BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Educational attainment appears to have relatively small impacts on wellbeing, with only minor variation between groups.

Overall, respondents with professional qualifications fared best across all four dimensions of wellbeing, though the leads were relatively small. In most cases, this group was followed by those with a degree or higher, though this group reported above-average anxiety.

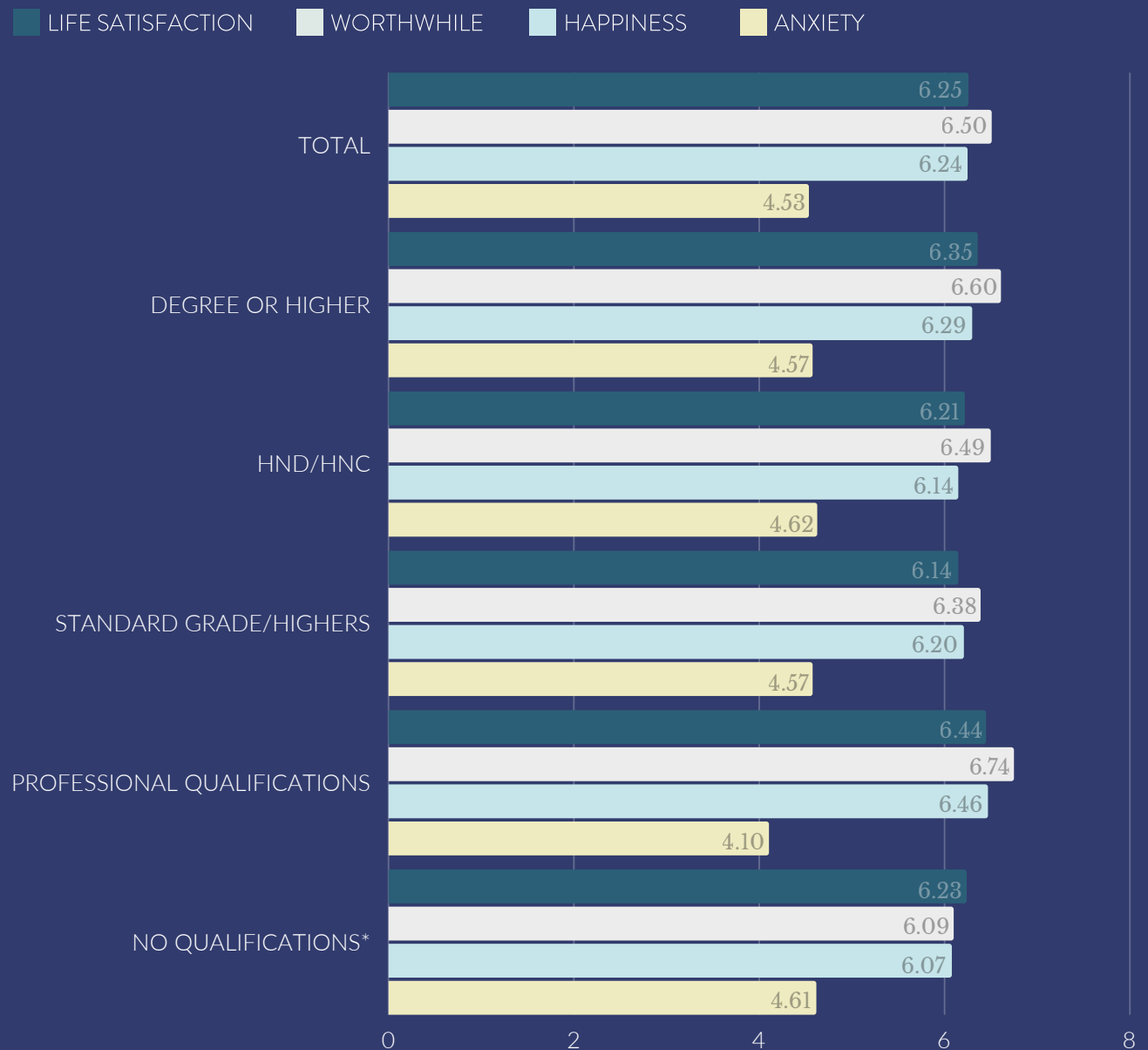
Respondents with no qualifications fared (among the) worst, with the lowest levels of reported worth and happiness, and among the highest levels of anxiety. They were also unique in that reported worth was lower than life satisfaction on average. Nevertheless, their life satisfaction overall was broadly in line with the overall average.

It should be noted, however, that relative differences between groups were small, with at most 0.65 points between the highest and lowest average values.



ASPECTS OF WELLBEING BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Weighted average of respondents' levels of life satisfaction, feelings of worth, happiness, and anxiety



Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? Where 0 is 'not at all satisfied' and 10 is 'completely satisfied'

Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? Where 0 is 'not at all worthwhile' and 10 is 'completely worthwhile'.

Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday? Where 0 is 'not at all happy' and 10 is 'completely happy'.

On a scale where 0 is 'not at all anxious' and 10 is 'completely anxious', overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

* denotes small sample size (n < 100)



TECHNICAL DETAILS

The survey was designed by Diffley Partnership and invitations were issued online using the ScotPulse panel. Fieldwork was conducted between the 29th September - 1st October, and received 2,203 responses from a representative sample of the adult population, aged 16+, across Scotland. Results are weighted to the Scottish population by age and gender.



FIND OUT MORE

To explore the results for yourself, visit our website [here](#), and register for exclusive updates and a quarterly bulletin [here](#).

If you are interested in having your own questions asked and answered in future waves of Understanding Scotland, email us at contact@understanding-scotland.co.uk



UNDERSTANDING SCOTLAND

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